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REVIEWS AND NOTES

DONNE'S SERMONS: Selected Passages, with an Essay, by Logan Pearsall Smith. Oxford University Press. pp. lii+264.

METAPHYSICAL LYRICS AND POEMS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: Donne to Butler; Selected and edited, with an Essay, by Herbert J. C. Grierson. Oxford University Press. pp. lviii+244.

LES DOCTRINES MÉDIÉVALES CHEZ DONNE, LE POÈTE MÉTAPHYSICIEN DE L'ANGLETERRE (1573-1631). Par Mary Paton Ramsay. Oxford University Press. pp. xi+338.

In publishing these two attractive volumes of selections from Donne's sermons and from the whole range of metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century, the Oxford University Press has performed a needed service to English literature. They will no doubt contribute to make Donne and his followers appear somewhat more approachable, both to the beginning student and to the general reader. The selections have been made with judgment and taste, and the introductory essays are both sympathetic and illuminating, and yet free from any exaggerated claims for the rather unpopular literature they interpret. Especially welcome is the volume selected from the sermons, for few students have ventured to search through the scarce original editions or the six volumes of Alford's edition to find the great passages of Donne's prose. Yet he undoubtedly deserves to be known as a great prose writer. Moreover, these selections may lead to a more general study among scholars of the whole body of Donne's sermons. For it is certain that no sound interpretation of metaphysical poetry is possible without a knowledge of Donne's mind and personality; and such a knowledge of course necessitates a study of his sermons as well as of his verse.

Miss Ramsay's book, a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris, is a study of all of Donne's work, both verse and prose, to ascertain his relation to medieval thought. She rightly insists on the importance of medieval thought, not only in Donne, but in the whole seventeenth century. For medievalism did not die from sheer futility, as is sometimes believed, nor did it suddenly become extinct with the arrival of humanism. In fact, medieval thought not only remained a vital force after the Renaissance, it even contributed some valuable elements to modern thought; for instance, the affinity of the idealism of Descartes with some persistent elements in medieval thought

has often been the subject of comment. Much of the characteristic intellectual turbulence of the seventeenth century is to be explained by this double nature of the period, both medieval and modern. In insisting on this medieval aspect of the seventeenth century, Miss Ramsay is following her eminent teacher of philosophy at the University of Paris, Professor Picavet, whose volumes (*Esquisse d'une Histoire Générale et Comparée des Philosophies Médiévales*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1907; *Essais sur l'Histoire Générale et Comparée des Philosophies Médiévales*, Paris, 1913) deserve the attention of students of literature as well as philosophy, who wish to understand the history of thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. M. Picavet has also emphasized the Neo-Platonic or Plotinian character of medieval philosophy, a wholesome corrective to the common conception that medieval thought was merely a series of subtle variations on the syllogism. Whatever reservations philosophers may make regarding M. Picavet's contention, it is very fruitful for the student of the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is in the most complete discipleship to M. Picavet that Miss Ramsay writes of Donne, seeking to explain by the persistence of this medieval Plotinian tradition "la mentalité du poète lui-même, et celle de sa génération" (p. 2).

But Miss Ramsay finds two difficulties in this attempt to show that Donne was a Plotinian. In the first place, such authorities as Courthope and Grierson have spoken of the "Pyrrhonism" of Donne, of his scepticism, of his failure to achieve a synthetic view of life and the world. She replies by denying that Donne was a sceptic. "Nos remarques," she says, "sont limitées à la littérature, mais nous croyons pouvoir affirmer qu'il ne faut pas parler de l'esprit sceptique dans la première partie du siècle. L'esprit de critique sceptique ne fit vraiment son apparition en Angleterre qu'avec Hobbes" (pp. 11-12). The second difficulty, which she frankly admits, is that Donne nowhere gives any systematic account of his own philosophy. But by taking passages from the sermons, letters or poems, a paragraph here, a line or a fragment of a line there, and arranging them coherently, with illustrative passages from Plotinus and the medieval philosophers, she is able to make a fairly complete system, as her chapter headings indicate. The third section of the thesis, devoted to the exposition of the "doctrines" of Donne, has chapters on the following subjects: "De l'Univers ou de l'Etre"; "De Dieu"; "Des Anges ou Substances Séparées"; "De l'Homme"; "De L'Union avec Dieu ou de l'Extase"; "Des Sciences."

The result of this method is interesting but questionable, for the method itself is not without a danger which Miss Ramsay has insufficiently guarded against, namely, the misinterpretation of a passage apart from its context. As it is necessary to justify

this criticism in as brief a manner as possible, I shall select my illustrations from the first twenty pages out of the one hundred and fifty devoted to the "doctrines" of Donne.

On the first page of this chapter Miss Ramsay says that Donne is medieval in the close relationship between his philosophy and his theology. She gives in a paragraph a summary of Donne's thought, which is at the same time a summary of Neo-Platonism. I quote the latter half of the paragraph:

"L'Etre Suprême c'est l'éternelle perfection, c'est Dieu, Unité et Trinité. Le monde matériel est le symbole du monde intelligible; Dieu nous parle constamment par ses créatures. Donne prend plaisir à développer ces idées, il y revient à tout moment. L'âme cherche toujours à remonter vers Dieu. 'Dieu, dit-il, 'seul est tout; non seulement tout ce qui est, mais tout ce qui n'est pas, tout ce qui aurait pu être, s'il avait voulu que ce fût . . .'" (p. 129).

But in its context the passage quoted does not suggest that "l'âme cherche toujours à remonter vers Dieu." It is part of a passage which is distinctly *not* Plotinian:

"First then, in our first part, we consider the persons, the shepherd and the sheep, him and them, God and man; of which persons the one for his greatness God, the other for his littleness, man, can scarce fall under any consideration. What eye can fix itself upon east and west at once? And he must see more than east and west that sees God, for God spreads infinitely beyond both: God alone is all; not only all that is, but all that is not, all that might be, if he would have it be. God is too large, too immense, and then man is too narrow, too little to be considered; for, who can fix his eye upon an atom? . . . He comes to us, God to man; all to nothing; for upon that we insist first, as the first disproportion between us, and so the first exaltation of his mercy towards us." (Alford I, 129-130.)

In her enthusiastic search for the Plotinian tradition in Donne, Miss Ramsay has overlooked some negative evidence even in passages which she quotes. For instance, impressed with the importance of the reason, the *vous*, in the Plotinian tradition, she ignores Donne's remarkable disparagement of the reason just as she minimizes the sceptical element in his work. She quotes (p. 135) the first line from the verse letter to the Countess of Bedford:

"Reason is our soul's left hand, Faith her right,"

but does not pause to ask why reason is placed in the second rank. A rather remarkable mistranslation immediately follows, on the same page: "L'homme régénéré n'est point fait de la foi seule; il est composé de la foi et de la raison. Bien que la racine de notre assentiment soit dans la foi, c'est la raison qui nous présente la chose et l'illumine." In the original the passage stands thus: "It is a great degree of mercy that [God] affords us signs. A natural man is not made of reason alone, but of reason and sense; a regenerate man is not made of faith alone, but of faith and reason; and signs, external things, assist us all. . . . He disobeys God in the way of contumacy, who

refuses his signs, his outward assistances, his ceremonies which are induced by his authority, derived for him, upon men, in his church, and so made a part, or a help, of his ordinary service, as sacraments and sacramental things are" (Alford, I, 29). Obviously, the words, "and signs, external things, assist us all," have been completely transformed in the process of translation.

Again, on page 136 an essential part of a passage has been omitted, and what is quoted is consequently liable to misunderstanding: "Il voyait aussi qu'elle [la raison] a ses limites et qu'elle peut faillir. La phrase suivante résume bien l'ensemble de sa pensée. 'Par la lumière de la raison,' dit Donne, 'dans le théâtre du monde, et par le moyen des créatures, nous voyons Dieu.'" The original is as follows: "By the light of nature, in the theatre of the world, by the medium of creatures, we see God; but to know God, by believing, not only him, but in him, is only in the academy of the church, only through the medium of the ordinance there, and only by the light of faith" (Alford, I, 420).

I shall take one more illustration, from page 149 of Miss Ramsay's book:

"Dans un sermon du mois de Mars, 1624, notre auteur fait allusion à la question de l'Ecole', savoir: s'il y a quelque chose qui soit *essentielllement* bon . . . Sur cette question du bien *essentiel* Donne offre sa réponse 'd'après l'Ecole.' Si par *essentielllement* l'on comprend une idée d'indépendance, d'existence parfaite qui subsiste par elle-même, il n'y a rien alors qui soit *essentielllement* bon sauf Dieu. Mais si l'on veut dire, au contraire, que *l'essence, l'être*, est bon, toutes choses sont bonnes car l'existence implique un bien *essentiel*."

But in Donne's sermon this question is debated more at length and with a different conclusion. Donne develops this question of the non-existence of evil by reference to Augustine's reply to the Manichees. He discusses the two kinds of evil, the *malum culpae* and *malum poenae*, the latter of which conduces to our welfare by its "medicinal correction." Donne approaches last the definitely philosophical question of the existence of the *malum culpae*:

"So then, this which we call *malum poenae*, affliction, adversity, is not evil; that which occasions this, *malum culpae*, sin itself, is not evil; not evil so, as that it should make us incapable of this diffusive goodness of God. You know, I presume, in what sense we say in the school, *malum nihil*, and *peccatum nihil*, that evil is nothing, sin is nothing; that is, it hath no reality, it is no created substance, it is but a privation, as a shadow is, as sickness is; so it is nothing. It is wittily argued by Boethius, God can do all things; God cannot sin; therefore sin is nothing. But it is strongly argued by St. Augustine, if there be anything naturally evil, it must necessarily be contrary to that which is naturally good; and that is God. How, *contraria aequalia*, says he; whatsoever things are contrary to one another, are equal to one another; so, if we make anything naturally evil, we shall slide into the Manichee's error, to make an evil God. So far doth the school follow this, as that there, one archbishop of Canterbury, out of another, that is, Bradwardine out of Anselm, pronounces it *Haereticum esse dicere, malum esse aliquod*. To say that anything is naturally evil, is an heresy.

"But if I cannot find a foundation for my comfort, in this subtlety of the school, that sin is nothing (no such thing as was created or induced by God, much less forced upon me by him, in any coactive degree) yet I can raise a second step for my consolation in this, that be sin what it will in the nature thereof, yet my sin shall conduce and cooperate to my good. . . ." (Alford, I, 288-289).

Certainly Donne could not indicate more decisively his own critical independence of the various doctrines of the scholastic traditions.

Obviously, in trying to state Donne's "doctrines" and religious experience in terms of Plotinianism, Miss Ramsay has done violence to our conception of him by excessively simplifying him, ignoring all the most characteristic extravagances, paradoxes, flashes of insight—she has, in short, obscured his peculiar genius. She compares him (p. 12) to Sir John Davies, author of *Nosce Teipsum*—a misleading comparison. Davies was content with a thoroughly conventional philosophy such as never at any stage in his career could have satisfied Donne. Any mention together of these two men should rather serve to emphasize the personal, individual, original nature of Donne's religious experience as well as of his poetry. As Grierson says in his *Introduction* (p. xxvii), Donne "is our first intensely personal religious poet, expressing always not the mind simply of the Christian as such, but the conflicts and longings of one troubled soul, one subtle and fantastic mind." It is this unique and intense religious experience which lies back of the metaphysical conceits of the sermons, as of the religious poetry. It gives the poetic force and the psychological fascination to the metaphysical style of Donne. The editor of the sermons confesses that he finds in them something "baffling and enigmatic which still eludes our last analysis. Reading these old hortatory and dogmatic pages, the thought suggests itself that Donne is often saying something else, something poignant and personal, and yet, in the end, incommunicable to us. It sometimes seems as if he were using the time-honored phrases of the accepted faith, its hope of heaven, and its terror of the grave, to express a vision of his own—a vision of life and death, of evil and horror and ecstasy—very different from that of other preachers; and we are troubled as well as fascinated by the strange music which he blows through the sacred trumpets" (p. xxv).

Throughout her study of Donne, Miss Ramsay has repeated that he was peculiarly the disciple of Augustine (see pp. 179, 181-2, 220, 225, 252-3, 257, etc.), but in her eagerness to prove Donne a Plotinian she has missed the significance of this discipleship. For it has a double significance, first regarding Donne's relation to medieval thought, and second, regarding the nature of his religious experience. As these are subjects which I intend to develop more at length elsewhere, I shall discuss them here only very briefly.

Siebeck, the learned historian of psychology, has long ago emphasized that the influence of Augustine in the Middle Ages, especially among the Nominalists and Mystics, counteracted the intellectualism of Aquinas (See Siebeck, *Die Anfänge der neueren Psychologie in der Scholastik* in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und phil. Kritik*, vol. 93, 1888, pp. 188 ff.). This opposition of religious temperaments was of course intensified by the Reformation. The Jansenist movement in France was an illuminating phase of it, and Pascal, far more than Sir John Davies, furnishes suggestive parallels to Donne. For Donne had learned in the school of affliction and anguish, which he so often refers to as the best school for the soul, that he needed another blessedness than truth and knowledge. Thomism, in its intellectualistic interpretation of the world, was an exposition, under Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian terms, of the Logos. But both Augustine and Donne were dissatisfied with the impersonal and intellectual conception of God in the Platonic tradition. In Plato we may find God, said Donne, but "without a Christ." (Alford, III, 47). The Word become flesh and living among us, partaking of our miseries and frailties, giving us the inexpressible consolation and comfort of a personal love and sacrifice for us, this was the religion of Augustine and Donne. Miss Ramsay has indeed noticed in passing this similarity between Donne and Augustine, and quotes an eloquent passage on the latter from Gaston Boissier (p. 252). But she has not recognized that this peculiar craving for peace was not to be satisfied by the Plotinian *νόσος*. Donne and Augustine desired, not primarily to *know* God, but to rest their souls in the bosom of God, in the bosom of Christ, who was God become humanity and therefore full of the sympathy they craved. This sense of the living personality of God and of Christ, and the dependence of his own soul upon its preciousness in the sight of Christ, is the essence of Donne's religious experience.

Upon this religious experience the restless intellect of Donne was working, and the result was the "metaphysical" or "conceited" style. In his labor to understand, to communicate, the experiences of his burning, passionate nature, he draws upon all life and all knowledge, upon the most homely matters of daily experience as well as upon the distinctions of the scholastic philosophies. It is a great error to represent Donne as always preoccupied with the subtleties of medieval thought. He was really preoccupied with the subtleties of his own soul. Donne preached out of his own experience, as he had startled his contemporaries, and as he has startled all his discerning readers since, by the sincerity of his poetry written out of his own experience. No one has looked more directly upon the realities of life, no one has had his vision of reality less impeded by tradition, than Donne. But in the expres-

sion of even the most subtle, evanescent or mystical phases of his experience, he sought to translate it into intellectual terms, into "conceits." There is a truth, in spite of its perverse and unsympathetic statement, in the familiar comment of George Macdonald, in *England's Antiphon*: "The central thought of Dr. Donne is nearly always sure to be just: the subordinate thoughts by means of which he unfolds it are often grotesque, and so wildly associated as to remind one of the lawlessness of a dream, wherein mere suggestion without choice or fitness rules the sequence." This remark may at any rate serve as a warning to us, when we read Miss Ramsay's book, to look for the solution of the riddle of this unique Renaissance saint, not in any systematization of his subordinate thoughts, so "often grotesque," but in those central thoughts which are not only just, but intensely poetical and intensely human.

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EINFUEHRUNG IN DAS STUDIUM DER INDOGERMANISCHEN SPRACHWISSENSCHAFT. By Josef Schrijnen, Professor an der Reichsuniversität Utrecht. Uebersetzt von Dr. Walther Fischer, Privatdozent an der Universität Würzburg. Heidelberg 1921, Carl Winter. 8-vo, X+340.

LANGUAGE. An Introduction to the Study of Speech. By Edward Sapir. New York, 1921, Harcourt, Brace & Co. 8-vo, VII+258.

It is a rare pleasure to review two books of such unquestionable value for the study and advancement of linguistic science. But while of equal merit, they present a most striking contrast to each other, differing radically in scope, attitude, and style, and in all of those subtle ways in which the writer's personality is stamped upon his work.

Schrijnen's book, while written by a Dutch scholar, is a characteristic exponent of German achievements and the German attitude towards science. It professes to be a relatively elementary introduction to the study of Indo-European linguistics, but at the same time it offers welcome orientation even to a well-trained specialist in Indo-European philology and should prove an invaluable aid to linguistic work in other branches. Its wealth of information is quite out of proportion to its small size. It contains a thoroughly adequate bibliography (though I missed reference to Buck's important *Ablaut*-articles); a more detailed discussion of the general principles of linguistics than is found in any other book of similar scope; a brief, but sufficient chapter on phonetics, including a satisfactory account